Rit. to vm

April 11, 1971

The Editor
The New York Post
New York, New York

Sir:

For John Barkham to begin his "review" of my book on the King assassination, FRAME-UP, with even the most casual reference to Shakespeare is to abuse the bard as he intended to abuse me. The one thing that certainly "seems to follow, as the night the day" when any book raises substantial questions about the official mythology on political assassinations, that there is never a conspiracy, is that professional sycophants will hastily denounce the book and proclaim there is never any conspiracy. It has become a minor, if important, literary industry.

And for Barkham to quote Polonius is as the whore murmuring "love", for the night-following-day line is from a dissertation on truth and inner honesty, two qualities with which Barkham does not soil his shameful scrivening.

He in no sense reflects the content, purposes or doctrine of FRAME-UP, cannot really have read it (the alternative being much less flattering, that he did not understand it), and in the few quotations from it is so unfaithful or egregiously wrong that it cannot be accidental.

Barkham's doctrine is clear. It is violence to every American concept: "Weisberg's theory is that Dr. King was the victim of a conspiracy [and may I interject that to the best of my knowledge all the victim's family, friends and associates agree, as does the Department of Justice, which still has an active conspiracy indictment filed in Birmingham - HW] and that Ray was the decoy rather than the killer. Who then was the real assassin? Here Weisberg falls back on vague allegations about 'a fat man' and 'a short, slight man'. This is flimsy stuff."

Since when in America, even in the era of political assassinations, was it incumbent upon writer or lawyer to prove who did commit a murder to establish an accused did not? Were this concept to prevail, who could ever be acquitted after accusation?

But if Barkham can cite where I say - or even hint - that any "fat" or "short, slight man" was the assassin, "was the real assassin," I'll eat his "review", seasoned with nothing but Maalox, on the steps of Bellevue Hospital or, what would be more appropriate to his prostitution of an honorable calling, the steps of his favorite whorehouse.

This is not exceptional in Barkham, whose first quotation of me is

that "he even questions the circumstances of the plea" (i.e., the deal that avoided the public trial, something even Barkham laments). Who didn't? Most newspapers did, and I cite a fair selection, including The New York Times (headed "Tongue-Tied Justice") and the Chicago Daily News (headed "Mystery Remains - Was Ray Part of Plot on King").

To accuse me of "hairsplitting" he cites part of my quotation of the minitrial transcript that proves the judge "did not ask Ray outright whether Ray had been the killer or whether he had done the killing alone," omitting the context, that Ray insisted there had been a conspiracy. I could not have been more explicit (as on pp.106-9). The point was not missed by other reviewers not serving preconceptions. On thisuquestion of conspiracy and exactly this part of FRAME-UP, Fred Cook, in The Saturday Review of April 10, wrote, "Here was the man who had to know, and at some risk to himself, he was telling the court that the script was phony."

Spitting in the face of overwhelming evidence, none of which he even pretends to refute and the existence of which he hides from his readers, Barkham condemns me for "contending" that this invidious and entirely anti-American deal "served to abbreviate court proceedings which might otherwise have revealed a conspiracy." How, in even Barkham's formulation, am I in error?

(It was "a shocking breach of faith with the American people" to the New York Times, quoted on p.79.)

Untroubled by his own sycophantic inconsistency, he yet concludes, "Weisberg's books ... make it even more regrettable that a full trial was never staged." Save for "staged", which is precisely what I expose, this is exactly what FRAME-UP does say and does prove.

Barkham finds "occasional carelessness one is able to detect", of which he cites but one, a typographical error. Famed lawyer Percy Foreman, who engineered the deal that sold Ray, Justice and history up the river, was not willing to face such alleged "occasional carelessness". Indeed, on Thursday, March 18, he fled a New York TV studio while his makeup was being applied rather than make an agreed appearance when he learned it included confronting me.

This "occasional carelessness" is calling Barkham "James" rather than "John". My own integrity precludes pleading the sweet smell of the rose. But what Barkham above all should know is that where he is quoted (pp.xi-xii), in his review of Will Bradford Huie's self-apology, the unofficial version of the official fiction Huie subsidized, "crass commercialism" to Barkham now, Barkham also found this unofficial account of the official entirely adequate. In what he titled "The Non-Story of James Earl Ray," Barkham concludes, "What Huie's book boils down to is a reporter's account of a big story he went after but failed to get."

With the real John Barkham - if there is one - please stand up?

Perhaps explanation lies in what is not once referred to in Barkham's lengthy diatribe styled "review", the FBI. Publisher's Weekly review (March 11) said of this that FRAME-UP "is pure TNT" and is a "sensational head-on assault on J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI and the government itself" for "suppressing of official evidence indicating Ray was not alone."

This is no exaggeration and the fact is beyond contradiction. I filed suit for what was suppressed, what was actually confiscated from the British court, won an almost unheard-of summary judgment against the Department of Justice, and reproduce in facsimile some of this evidence that disproves the allegations in the Memphis mimicry of a trial. When to this we add that it proves the FBI was not able to place Ray at the scene of the crime when it was committed, could not identify the rifle from which the fatal shot was fired, what better reason for Barkham's ignoring all this, or his allegations of "occasional carelessness"?

If this is the only factual error he can cite from a long and thoroughly documented book (the evidentiary appendix alone is of 46 pages and much is reproduced in facsimile in the text), Barkham invites examination of his own accuracy in his "review".

He says of me that I "wrote a book questioning the findings of the Warren Commission" (emphasis added). The copyright page of FRAME-UP lists six.

"Among the wealth of documents cited (sic!) by Weisberg is a letter by Ray's lawyer setting out certain of these lucrative arrangements ... was also printed in the New York Post on April 8, 1969."

There was not one such letter but two, both printed in facsimile for the first time in FRAME-UP (pp.503-4). They do not "set out" what Barkham describes as "certain of thesellucrative arrangements." They are Percy Foreman's bribe - added to the threat he'd be killed - to assure Ray's silence for 24 hours, through the mini-trial. The "lucrative arrangements" are in the various incredible contracts, also reproduced in facsimile for the first time on pages 489-502.

That Ray got not a cent and Foreman expected a half-million dollars is hardly a "lucrative arrangement" for Ray, as it is unworthy of note for Barkham's readers.

And, the Post did not "print" these letters.

Necessarily, a reviewer is entitled to wide latitude in comment on a book. He may dislike the author, the subject or anything else about it. He does not, however, enjoy a license to entirely misrepresent, misquote or to be as unerringly and totally dishonest as Barkham is in this case.

Were FRAME-UP concerned with minor matters, perhaps Barkham's hate, venom and corruption might be more tolerable, if never acceptable as valid literary commentary. However, it deals with the most costly crime in history, with the integrity of society and the viability of a system of justice. Whether or not this shabby sycophant considers it his responsibility to defend the government he never mentions, FRAME-UP documents the failure of all the institutions of government in time of crisis, something no free society can survive. As The Saturday Review put "the issue", it is with "this greatest of democracies ... have been reduced to the status of a Latin American banana republic."

Therefore, in fairness to this "issue", yourself, your readers and to me, I ask that you publish this response to Barkham's abandonment of every precept of a once-honorable calling and forward it to every publication in which Barkham was syndicated.

And to prove that Barkham knows he was dishonest and intended to be, I add this challenge: Let him arrange a gang-up debate against me by all the prosecutors and Foreman and any of the nameless FBI, on their work, mine, or any combination of their choosing, which Barkham can then moderate.

I predict he and they will not accept this challenge.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg